

Meekness
Matthew 5:5
Halifax: 26 October 2003

Introduction:

Two thousand years ago, the Son of God left the glory of Heaven to come into this sinful, perishing world and establish a kingdom of righteousness and life!

- He came to bring blessing.
- It is therefore no surprise that as Jesus began His ministry in Galilee,
 - He went everywhere preaching the gospel of the kingdom!
 - In the Great Sermon that Matthew records for us as an example of His preaching,
 - It is no surprise that He who came to bring blessing should begin by pronouncing blessing on those who should enter His kingdom.

But there is something very surprising about the way Jesus identifies them.

- Surely, you would expect Him to pronounce His blessing on the ones who had attained great things in religion!
 - On the ones who were righteous and moral and good!
- But we have seen that Jesus does not do this!
 - Instead, He pronounces His blessing on the ones who are painfully aware of their failure to please God...
 - of their inability to live a godly and righteous life!
 - He pronounces as blessed those who see themselves as poor in spirit—
 - not lacking in material substance, but lacking in spiritual character!
 - Those who are mourning because of their sin, because of their spiritual barrenness and death!
- What comfort this is for you if you know yourself to be a sinner!
 - Jesus brings a blessing not for the righteous, but for the unrighteous!
 - The blessed ones in His kingdom are those who have come to an end of themselves and have come to Him for salvation!
 - They realise that they can't even live a decent life on their own...
 - much less a life that is pleasing or even acceptable to God...
 - But here is a kingdom for such people where redemption is promised!

The first two beatitudes focus on what you find in yourself apart from Christ...

- but in the third and fourth beatitude,
 - the blessing is pronounced on those who look outside of themselves for help.

Today, we will look at the third beatitude:

- Matt 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

You can see that there is a logical progression here.

- First, you come to the place where you are no longer satisfied with what you are because of your sin—you are poor in spirit.
 - Then you mourn because of your sinful condition...
 - And from there you become meek—
 - A meek person is someone who no longer wishes to govern himself because he knows he will only mess things up.
 - That is the essence of meekness.

I. You are meek when you are fed up with governing yourself and start looking to others to govern you.

- You are no longer going to try to force your way or your will because you don't trust yourself any more...
 - You don't trust yourself to do any thing more than make a mess of things, so you will rely on others!

A. If you think about it, this is something that happens all the time in this world.

1. My sister is an investment portfolio manager for Bernstein.

- Last year, I asked her how the downturn in the stock market had affected her company.
- She replied that they were swamped with people seeking their services.
 - The reason?
 - Because so many investors who had enjoyed fat profits making their own investment decisions had lost fortunes when the market changed.
- These investors were poor in spirit—they had decided that they did not have what it takes to manage their own finances...
 - And they were mourning because of the trouble their own way had caused.
 - They came to her in meekness, ready to listen to whatever she had to tell them!

- Do you think these humble investors were prepared to quarrel with her about the way she was proposing to do things with their portfolio?
 - No! They were there with poverty of spirit and in great meekness.
- That is the way a convicted sinner is when he comes to Jesus.
 - He does not come to direct the Lord!
 - He comes to be saved!
 - He comes with the grand mess that he has made and meekly submits to Jesus.

2. I could just as well illustrate with the insecure teen...

a. He looks at his own life, and he says,

- “I have made a mess of things.”
- “I simply don’t fit in.”
- “Nobody likes me.”
- He is poor in spirit and he is mourning.
 - What is the next?

b. He becomes very meek...

- Over there is some kid who seems to have it all together!
 - The desperate kid becomes the-together-kid’s disciple!
 - Sometimes, even to the point of absurdity!
 - The same hair, the same clothes, the same jewellery, the same lingo, the same music, the same attitude!
 - He even watches to see how he is supposed to carry his books—what kind of book bag, with a strap over the shoulder, or what?
 - This is radical discipleship!
 - He becomes an imitator of the cool kid.
- Incidentally, this is what the marketing companies love!
 - If they advertise right, they can make the meek kid spend big dollars to get just the right look.

B. Now of course when Jesus pronounces these blessings on the poor in spirit, the mourners, and the meek...

1. He is not speaking of any random person that has become dissatisfied with himself and has starting following others...

- a. Jesus is speaking of those who have come to follow **Him!**
 - He is talking about those who are fed up with being governed by anyone other than God.
 - They are malleable indeed—
 - But they are malleable in His hands, not in anyone else’s hands!

- b. Look at the kid who follows the cool kid...
 - He is like putty to the cool kid... even with his book bag...
 - But to his parents and his teachers, he is like stone...
 - If they try to tell him something that contradicts what the cool kid says, it will be utterly rejected!
 - He will not listen to another, he is a faithful disciple.

- 2. This is what Jesus was talking about in Luke 14:26 when He said:
 - “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

- a. The meek person is not necessarily a person with no backbone...
 - a person who just follows whoever he is with at the moment,
 - or whoever puts the most pressure on him at the time.
 - Jesus is talking about the one who comes to be governed by him instead of anyone else!

- b. Look at the examples of the meek persons in the Bible!
 - They are like putty in God’s hands,
 - but like stone in the hands of anyone else.

- 1) Moses was the meekest man on the earth in his day—the Bible says he was!
 - Yet, he would not compromise an inch when it came to God’s commandments!
 - He was not like Aaron when the people made the golden calf...
 - Aaron felt pressured by all the people to make the calf, so he gave in. Aaron was meek toward the people.
 - But Moses was meek toward God!
 - And consequently, when it came to the worship of God, it didn’t matter what the people wanted—
 - The only thing that mattered to Moses was what God said.

- 2) Now look at Jesus...
- Jesus was meek,
 - Yet He made a whip and went into the temple court and drove out the moneychangers!
 - And I tell you, He did it *because* He was meek!
 - We are told that it was zeal for His Father's house that had eaten Him up when He did that!
 - Jesus cared for the holiness of God's sheep, and so He had no tolerance for those wicked money changers that were making His Father's house into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves!
- 3) We could go on with many examples of others... but you get the point...
- a) The meek that Jesus blesses are not those who do whatever people want...
1. They are the ones who have lost all confidence in man!
 - They have lost all confidence in themselves.
 - They have lost all confidence in the heroes of this world.
 - They have lost all confidence in following the crowd.
 2. They have come to follow Jesus and to be governed by Him.
- b) This tells you how deep their dissatisfaction with themselves goes!
- It is not just with their own government,
 - but the government of any other member their fallen human race!
 - Paul places himself and all of Christ's disciples as among those...
 - who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,
 - He had so lost faith in himself that his distrust extended to the whole human race with the sole exception of Jesus Christ.
 - Such is the case with the meek person of whom Jesus speaks.
 - You simply don't trust in man anymore.

C. But having said this, let me guard you against one big error here!

1. Do not suppose that the meek person is one who rejects all human authority under the pretence that he is following Jesus alone!
 - I don't want to hear about any of you children refusing to clean your room because you are trying to be meek—
 - and it was not Jesus, but your Mom that told you to clean your room...
 - Nor do I want any of you to decide that you don't need to go to church anymore because you just want to read the Bible yourself and don't need anyone to teach you or any elders to watch for your soul!
 - There are people who follow that sort of logic!

2. But a person who is truly meek before God is a person who respects not only God Himself, but also those He has appointed to govern!
 - a. They believe that “every soul ought to be subject to the governing authorities...”
 - They believe that “there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”
 - They believe that “whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.”
 - That is what it says in Romans 13.
 - Do you see what this means?
 - It means that when your Mom tells you to clean your room,
 - you had best look at it as if God just came down from heaven and told you to clean up your room!
 - It means that when you go to hear the word of God preached,
 - You have better not reject it just because it came from a minister unless that minister has told you something that is not backed up by God's word...
 - It means that when Jesus appointed elders to govern His church, He appointed them to go as His representatives!
 - If you reject their government, you reject His government!
 - That is why we don't allow people to come to the Lord's Table who are not members of some branch of His church.
 - b. But how does this mesh with idea of having to disobey and reject human authority in order to be true to Jesus?
 - 1) It is like this...
 - There are times when you have to disobey duly appointed authorities.

- And that is whenever they ask you to something contrary to God's clearly revealed will.
- 2) There are several examples of this.
- Do you remember when Saul wanted to kill David?
 - His son Jonathan refused to submit to him, either as father or as king, because it was wrong.
 - Do you remember when Peter and John were forbidden to preach the gospel by the religious authorities of their day?
 - In a respectful manner they replied:
 - Acts 5:19-20: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."
- 3) Yet, you must be careful to obey as much as you can, even if the authority is not obedient to God, because he has been put there by God.
- You honour God by honouring the authority, even though the authority is always unworthy of God.
 - In 1 Peter 3, a woman is told how to treat a husband who does not obey God's Word...
 - 1 Pet 3:1-2: "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct."
 - And in 1 Peter 2:18, a servant is told how to respond to a wicked master:
 - 1 Pet 2:18-20: Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.
- c. So don't even to pretend to yourself that you are one of the meek ones that Jesus talks about in this passage if you are not meek toward those that are in authority over you.
3. And before I leave this point, understand that it also applies to you who are in authority!
- a. If you are meek, you will not exercise that authority without meekness before God...

- as if you were there by your own doing and for your own purposes!
- b. If you are meek, you will govern the way Jesus governs...
 - for the good of those who are under your care!
 - That certainly does not mean that you will always do what they want, but it does mean that so far as you are able, you will always endeavour to do what God wants!
 - It means that you will be more broken that God has been disobeyed than you are that you have been disobeyed.
 - In other words, your goal will not be to uphold your own honour for your own sake, but His honour.

TRANS> So you see that you must guard against two errors related to meekness:

- The first is to suppose that the meekness that Jesus speaks about is a certain kind of disposition to do whatever other people want...
- The second is to suppose that it is a disposition to be contrary to everyone except Jesus.

II. Now let us look at some characteristics of the meek person.

A. Remember that the meek person is the one who has given up on governing Himself and has come to be governed by King Jesus.

1. We may say that the first characteristic of the meek person is that he will be teachable.
 - He will be looking to God to give Him instruction about how to live and how to be.
 - He will submit to the counsel of Jesus Christ and to His word.
2. Do you remember what we read in Proverbs 3 about this?
 - a. v.1: My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands;
 - If you come to Jesus with meekness, you will remember what He has said because you will meditate on—you will carry it with you so that you can apply it.
 - You forget things that you don't use!
 - The kid who is trying to learn the right way to carry his books has no problem remembering the method because it's so important to him.
 - b. If you are meek, you do not lean on your own understanding and are not wise in your own eyes. (that is part of being teachable)

- You do not dispute with the Lord about what He says, but as James puts it, you:
 - James 1:21: “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”
 - If you quarrel with God about what He says, you still don’t understand your poverty of spirit.
 - You think you have some wisdom by which you can dispute with the living God!
 - I don’t mean you may not wrestle to understand, but it is quite another thing to dispute.

TRANS> So the first characteristic of meekness is teachability.

B. A second characteristic of meekness is that it is full of mercy and kindness toward others.

1. A meek person is very kind and gentle toward others.

- He is not full of demands of others because he himself has been broken and has found himself unfit to judge.
- He is not so focused on what others owe him, but on how he can serve them.

2. In James 4, James explains how fighting arises among us:

- James 4:1-2: Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.
- You get your focus on what other people ought to be doing for you and they don’t do it, so you start quarreling and fighting.
 - A meek person does not demand his own rights...
 - He does not take all his rights as claims...
 - but he focuses on how he can serve others.
 - He has come to the end of himself, and has no more claim to make.
- This is the attitude Paul had when he declared that he was a debtor to all men!
 - Rather than feeling that somebody owed him something—some recognition or some honour or some sympathy...
 - Paul saw himself as having received far more than he deserved—
 - He really did think himself to be deserving of Hell,
 - so when he got anything better than that (which he always did) he was full of gratitude!
- Some people spend their whole life nursing grudges.
 - These people need to learn meekness!

C. A third characteristic of meekness is calmness.

1. It takes a load of weight off of you when you come to Jesus.
 - Not only because Jesus shows you the way of blessedness and eternal life...
 - But because He Himself fulfills the requirements of God's law for you.
 - And not only that,
 - but also because He has all authority to give us eternal life, to supply us with the Holy Spirit, and to govern the whole world for our salvation.
 - there is great comfort and security!
2. What a wonderful person He is to entrust yourself to as King.
 - a. This is what makes you able to bear affliction and chastisement.
 - You know that it is sent from the hand of King Jesus who knows what is best for you and who always does what is best.
 - It does not comport with meekness to grumble and complain under God's disciplined training the way Israel did in the wilderness.
 - They were persuaded that they had a better way to do things.
 - But the meek person understands Prov 3:11-12
 - Prov 3:11-12: My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

TRANS> Having such a gracious, mighty King makes you patient in affliction...

- But this is not all...
- b. This is also what keeps you from fretting about the wicked and their prosperity.
 - 1) Jesus quotes this beatitude from Psalm 37, and there the righteous man is exhorted not to fret when he sees the wicked having his way.
 - When an enemy nation is gaining strength and you are weak!
 - The Lord says, don't worry about it.
 - You have come to be governed by Me—the wicked will perish, he will come to his end, but you will inherit the earth.
 - 2) In 1 Peter 3 where women are told to submit to husbands who do not obey the word, it also tells them how to find strength to do it..
 - They are able to do it by entrusting themselves to the wise government and tender care of the Lord.

- This means that rather than feeling like they have to counter and fix everything their husbands do, they can let it go.
- They can bear calmly and patiently with his selfish financial decisions and his foolish ways without anxiety.
- This is true under whatever authority you find yourself.
 - The meek person is not all agitated and fretful when unjust laws are passed in his land.
 - He is not unmoved by it, for he laments that God has found it necessary to chasten his nation in this way...
 - but he does not become all anxious and distracted such that he feels he must take matters into his own hands.
 - He is able to wait upon the LORD.

TRANS> I hope you have a pretty good idea now of what it is to be meek because now I want to turn to the promise that Jesus gives to the meek:

III. The meek, He says, shall inherit the earth.

A. This is God's promise throughout the Bible.

1. When God first came to Abraham, He promised to give him the land of Canaan as an inheritance.
 - a. This was much more than a mere piece of real estate.
 - It was the land in which God was to gather His people together to worship Him...
 - It was here that He would gather His people to be governed by Him...
 - He would give them His counsel and establish in His ways.
 - He would correct them when they erred by sending droughts and enemies, and prophets to call them to repentance.
 - He would receive their prayers and their praises.
 - In this land, he would show them Jesus Christ, their righteousness, first through the ordinances of the temple, and then in the fullness of time, through His appearing in human flesh and blood.
 - The land was the place where God established communion with His redeemed people, and graciously blessed them with His gifts.
 - b. And so it was that when God gave His people an inheritance in the land,
 - He was giving them a place in His eternal kingdom.

- Whenever He told them that they would inherit the land or inherit the earth,
 - He assuring them of an eternal, blessed communion with Himself through Jesus Christ.
 - It was a place where they would again be governed by God in fullest sense that the word govern can be used...
 - He would supply perfectly all they needed, and they would live gloriously and beautifully as His People.
 - 1 Peter 2:9-10: But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.
2. The promise to inherit the land was very obviously meant to convey more to them than just a temporal place to live for seventy or eighty years.
- a. Otherwise, Psalm 37 would have brought little comfort to them when it assured them that the meek will inherit the earth.
- The whole context of this Psalm has to do with the prosperity of the wicked, prospering and flourishing in the earth...
 - And the encouragement is that the wicked will soon be cut off,
 - but that those who trust God (the meek) will inherit the earth.
 - What comfort would there be to see one generation after another of the meek live and die while the unrighteous continued to flourish?
 - The promise will be complete when every one of God's people is raised from the dead to live in perfect fellowship with Him, unmolested by the wicked, and free from their own sin and misery.
 - What comfort would there be for them to see Moses, living and dying in the wilderness without being able to ever set foot in the land if the promised inheritance referred only to this life?
 - Israel would say,
 - "What comfort is it to me to serve this God who promises me the earth and gives me the wilderness?"
 - And I confess, that is what many of rebellious Israel did say...
 - And they said it because they did not understand what God was promising when He promised the land!
 - They were just looking for a nice piece of real estate where they could settle down with their family and prosper.

- They were not looking for the fullness of God's promised kingdom!
- b. The promise that the meek will inherit the earth is given in the fifth commandment.
- This commandment declares,
 - "Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you."
 - The meek are those who honour the authorities that God has placed over them...
 - They have given up on governing themselves and have submitted to God's government...
 - And God promises to such persons that they will live long in the land that He is giving them...
 - They will not be cut off from God's kingdom, but will live in it forever.
- c. Roman 8:19-22 makes it clear that the whole creation is groaning as it waits for the redemption of the bodies of God's People.
- Just as our bodies will be perfectly renewed, so the earth itself and all it contains will be renewed!
 - As Christians, we do not believe in reincarnation—that we are given different bodies,
 - but we believe in resurrection—that these same bodies are made new, given new properties and made immortal!
 - Since God has promised to give us the earth,
 - and since the whole creation is pictured as waiting for this to happen because it was subjected to corruption...
 - It seems to force the conclusion that the earth will not be replaced, but transformed as a glorious habitation for the sons of God.
 - They will inherit it...
 - It will no longer take dominion over them by storms and droughts and thorns and thistles—and burial!
 - But it will be perfectly subject to them—
 - They will be given dominion over it, and it will perfectly obey them.

TRANS> So understand then, that the promise of inheriting the earth is the promise of inheriting a place where God governs in perfect righteousness forever.

- It is the promise of the eternal kingdom of God.
- B. But to whom is this inheritance given?
1. Well, our text tells us—
 - “The meek shall inherit the earth.”
 - I have already shown you who the meek are...
 - They are the ones who have learned what it means to be a human being...
 - That human beings were created to be governed by God.
 - a. Now it only makes sense that if God is going to renew the earth in order to establish His glorious kingdom where righteousness dwells—
 - it simply would not do to have those who are in rebellion against Him there.
 - Only the meek will inherit the earth.
 - As Psalm 37 says, the wicked will be cut off.
 - b. But what good is this for those who are mourning because of their sin?
 - 1) Can we who continue to find sin and rebellion in our hearts and lives claim to be meek?
 - Yes, we can in this respect.
 - Our meekness is shown, not in perfect righteousness, but in coming to Jesus to be redeemed by Him!
 - It is in coming to Him with brokenness over our spiritual poverty,
 - looking to Him and submitting to Him to do what is needed to reconcile us to God and make us holy.
 - Our meekness, as sinners, is to give up on fixing ourselves and come to Jesus for salvation.
 - 2) You are meek if you confess that your only hope for salvation is in Jesus Christ...
 - with His death on the cross to atone for your sins and His gift of the Spirit to make you holy.
2. You see, it is Jesus who inherits the earth for us.
 - a. Because of His obedience to the Father, He was given all authority in Heaven and earth!
 - And His dominion over earth was seen in that He was put into the grave and the grave could not keep Him!

- He went to that grave with the sins of all His people...
 - but because He had shed His blood to atone for those sins,
 - The grave could not hold Him.

- b. And so you are made complete only by association with Jesus!
 - 1) It is the kingdom of righteousness that He came to establish in this fallen world that inherits the earth.
 - It is a kingdom of redeemed sinners.

 - 2) And I declare to you by the authority of Jesus Christ that...
 - not one of you will inherit this kingdom of righteousness unless you are meek...

 - 3) And for you, meekness means that you have given up on making yourself fit for that kingdom and that you come humbly (and meekly) to Jesus Christ.
 - As King, He inherits the earth for all His people.
 - And as Redeemer, He qualifies you for that kingdom.

Conclusion:

So let me urge you to give up on yourself!

- The blessing of Christ's kingdom is not for those that try to make their own way and achieve their own inheritance...
 - It is for those who meekly cast themselves upon Christ to obtain the promised inheritance by Him.
 - This blessing is the blessing of His kingdom for those who are poor in spirit and who mourn over their sins.